

COUNCILMEMBER HOWARD A. DENIS

NEWS FOR DISTRICT 1

Summer 2001



Dear Neighbors,

This is the first in what I intend to be a series of periodic reports about what's happening here at the Council that affects our part of the County, District 1. Keep your eye out also for the Council's annual report for more detailed information about the budget just approved by the Council for the coming year.

It is an honor and a delight to represent you on the Montgomery County Council. What an exciting year it has been!

Having represented Montgomery County in the Maryland State Senate for many years, I understand our concerns from different perspectives. I have discovered that serving you on the County Council is very different from serving in the Maryland Senate. As one of nine on the Council, and one of one for District 1, our contact with each another is much more direct. I am much better able to find out what you need. I am also better able to leverage County government for your benefit.

This year has also been reminiscent of working in a foreign country and learning the language. I have a new appreciation of the duty of public servants to bridge the gap between "insider speak" and the community at large. DPS, DPWT, AGP, AOB, OLO, MFP, PHED ... the list goes on and on. Sometimes we, here in the County government, can speak for paragraphs using initials and acronyms and, therefore, communicating only with the initiated. It strikes me that such an approach tends to separate government from you and that is exactly the opposite of the outcome I strive for. You have my commitment to continue striving to make County government more intelligible, accessible, and useful to each of you.

Many of you have welcomed me to your community meetings. I value those opportunities to get to know you better and to gain a fuller appreciation of your interests and concerns. Please keep inviting me. I promise to come!

THE BUDGET

The Council wrestled with budget decisions made more difficult by the slowing economy. We managed to meet our needs, balance the budget, and hold the line on taxes! Our strong commitment to education shaped the Council's decisions to funnel additional resources to our schools. Students will reap the benefits of these resources with expansion of a number of program already under way, such as smaller class sizes and all-day Kindergarten. Our budget also addressed the need for facilities for a burgeoning school-age population and the varied requirements of an increasingly diverse student population.



Other "big winners" in the budget were ballfields, transit, parks, human services, and cultural facilities, such as the Bethesda Library. Significant cost increases required the Council to decide again on the library's much-needed renovation. I was glad to be able to work with my fellow Council members to insure that sufficient funding is available to do the job correctly.

I was struck this year, again, with the enormous number of worthwhile demands on the County's resources, public and private. Deciding which of these important needs will receive funding is a daunting and humbling exercise.

OUR SCHOOLS, OUR KIDS, OUR FUTURE

Of course, schools are of critical importance to all of us. Several schools in District 1 are seriously in need of modernization or expansion, or both. During the Council's consideration of the Capital Improvements Program, I made sure that Farmland and Potomac Elementary Schools' needs were addressed, and that Walter Johnson High School's addition stayed on track. I am also gratified that the Wood Acres Elementary School project is proceeding on schedule.



Walter Johnson is in a unique situation, because its modernization will proceed while the school continues to operate. Certain construction must be done in this upcoming year to insure that the students and staff are safe and that learning can proceed during construction. My colleagues responded to my efforts to protect this construction, and as a result, even in an extremely difficult budget year, the Walter Johnson project remains on schedule.

Unfortunately, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School's modernization has been fraught with difficulty. As of this spring, the school system had to reach the unavoidable conclusion that the school would not be ready to receive its students and staff in September.

The question then became: would B-CC come “home” mid-year, or have to wait until September 2002? The B-CC community was unanimous. It wanted to be home by January 1, 2002. Together we worked with the school system, which was cooperative and supportive, and the move will take place during Winter Break.

I am enormously impressed with the work of the B-CC staff, students, and parents, to reach this goal. All will be called upon to work extra hard and be flexible, because mid-year moves for schools are so challenging. I’ve seen clear evidence that this community is up to the task!

OPEN SPACE, AN ENVIRONMENTAL NECESSITY

The Council approved the Legacy Open Space program last year – a six-year, \$33 million effort to protect County green spaces, environmental areas, urban spaces and historical sites for future generations. The Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan, which maps out how we’ll proceed, has my support. As a member of the Council’s Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee, I joined my colleagues in recommending approval.



Last summer, residents in a Bethesda neighborhood contacted me about a small piece of property that they had enjoyed as a gem of a local park for decades. The County had sold the property, and the new owners intended to build a home. The matter is still in court.

I want to insure that the County responds to the neighborhood’s desire to protect the property as open space, once the legal process is completed. Toward that end, I suggested to the Council that it add the Maiden Lane property to the Legacy Open Space Master Plan. I believe our District needs more recreational facilities and more green space. I am working hard to reach that goal.

I am also a strong supporter of the Capital Crescent Trail, and was pleased to be part of the 5–4 Council majority that voted to build a trestle to enhance that magnificent recreational amenity.

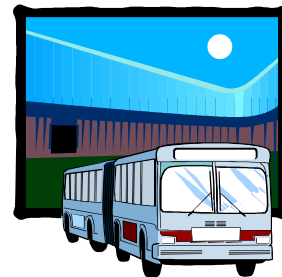
PROTECTING OUR RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

One of the first issues many of you brought to me was your concern about the appearance of commercialization of some properties that had extensive paving in their front yards. I heard loud and clear that you were unhappy that the County’s zoning law did not establish limits on the amount of paving in residential areas.

To fill this gap, I have introduced legislation to create a limit on the amount of impervious surface in a front yard, especially in the residential zones with smaller lots. I hope that the change in the law will protect the character of our precious residential communities - and enhance the environment by improving the drainage of water.

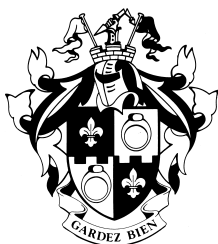
MASS TRANSIT

As a longtime user and supporter of mass transit, I worked hard to keep the N7 bus route in operation from Montgomery Mall to the Federal Triangle downtown. Enhanced mass transit is a key to the balanced transportation policy we need in Montgomery County to deal with congestion.



These are just some of the matters I've worked on in your behalf during the past year. Again, I enjoy representing you, and look forward to our continuing to work together. Let me know what you think. Please feel free to contact me by telephone at 240-777-7964, by fax at 240-777-7989, and by email at Councilmember.Denis@co.mo.md.us.

Very truly yours,



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